

# Community Renewal Programming,

by Humphrey Carver, 1965

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FRONT COVER: *The home of Sir Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine with the focal point of old Boucherville — the Church — in the background.*

INSIDE FRONT COVER: *Patterns — The Professional Building, Edmonton, NFB.*



Canada is fast approaching 1967 — the celebration of one hundred years of Confederation. It will be a year of reflection on the past and thoughts of the future. It will be a year of stock-taking for Canadians. As we begin our second century of Confederation, we will have an excellent opportunity to show the rest of the world our land, our raw materials and resources, and show them our progress and our expectations for the years to come.

Perhaps the focal point of all the Centennial plans is the World's Fair to be held in Montreal. Here, on a grand scale, countries of the world, using the theme "Terre des Hommes" will meet, exhibit, entertain, and explain their own people and cultures.

To publicize the year, the Centennial Commission has asked all government departments, businesses and corporations to utilize the official Centennial symbol. In the form of a maple leaf, the symbol is composed of eleven equilateral triangles, one for each province, and one at the apex representing the two territories in our great North.

The maple leaf is well chosen. Both here and abroad it is becoming identified with Canada — our people and our abundant resources.

Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation will be proud to display the Centennial Symbol on all publications and stationery.



# Community Renewal Programming

The following article is from a paper delivered to the American Society of Planning Officials  
by Humphrey Carver, Chairman of the Advisory Group, CMHC

The title of this paper has a particular meaning to Americans because it is the title of an exercise carried out by city governments with the aid of grants from the Urban Renewal Administration in Washington. This is known for short as "CRP". To Canadians the expression "community renewal programming" is only a rather complicated thought that sounds rather like what we call "urban renewal studies". Whichever title you use, the language is horribly clumsy, tedious and overloaded with the obsequious good intentions of public servants. For shining virtue you can't beat the words "community", "renewal" and "program".

The language is a pity because we are talking about an extraordinarily dramatic idea, in trying to describe and guide the shifting scenes of city life. New generations of people keep coming on to the stage, acting and feeling and moving around in quite new ways. The scenery is continually changing: new sets are brought on and, piece by piece, the previous staging is removed and new scenery built. The programming we are talking about is like a choreography for an intricate, interwoven performance to be enacted over several decades. To try and comprehend the form of all this and try to put it down in a CRP or an Urban Renewal Study requires remarkable intellectual talents and a vast range of techniques and instruments. It involves understanding people, money, politics, engineering and urban design. Perhaps we are presumptuous.

I am told that the series of Urban Renewal Studies we started in 1955 was the origin of the idea that was picked up by authorities in Washington in 1959 and further elaborated and refined into CRP. Now that the original idea has been improved upon, we are prepared to borrow it back again. Canadians are very interested in what they can learn here because we are now probably going to start on a second round of renewal studies and these will probably be more like CRP.

It's not strictly true to say that the idea was first invented in Canada. As a matter of fact the idea was born in a taxi-cab between the Pennsylvania Station and the Grand Central when Matt Lawson, Toronto's Director of Planning, and I were on our way back from an ASPO Conference. The Toronto Urban Renewal Study was

started in June 1955 and was the pilot project in what has become an important part of our urban renewal experience. Since then studies have been done in more than 50 communities. Broadly the facts are as follows:

Studies have been undertaken in 54 cities and towns. In round terms one-third of these studies have been completed and some urban renewal action has followed as a consequence, about one-third of the studies have not yet been completed and in another third of the places the studies have been completed but either nothing has followed or some renewal action is still under consideration. Of course one would expect a considerable time to elapse between the starting of a study, that may take two or three years for completion, and the first action. Of the 26 studies started before 1960 only six have failed to produce any action. Of those started since 1960 only three have so far led to action.

The average costs of the studies has been about \$30,000. Almost half have been budgeted for under \$20,000, rather more between \$20,000 and \$50,000 and three or four for larger amounts. The whole series to date will represent an expenditure of \$1½ million of which the federal government will pay 75% under Part V of the National Housing Act.

Finding experienced and qualified people to do this work has been a great difficulty. About 60% of the studies have been carried out by private consulting firms and the rest have been carried out by the cities' own planning staffs.

Most of the studies I am speaking of belong in what might be called Round One of urban renewal in Canada, because they were done before the 1964 amendments to the National Housing Act. Their aim was to look broadly at blighted housing areas and pick out particular sites for clearance and redevelopment, either for housing or for some other re-use. The focus was on redevelopment sites. Round Two, following the 1964 amendments, introduces a new feature: that is the designation of a defined area for an "urban renewal scheme" that may involve several different kinds of renewal action that can now be supported by federal government funds, in addition to clearance and redevelopment. Within a "scheme" area existing housing





Uniacke Square Redevelopment Area, Halifax, N.S.

can be refinanced with NHA mortgage insurance and a municipality can obtain grants and loans for many different types of neighborhood improvements. There is now a focus on conserving and rehabilitating what is worth keeping. Towards the cost of preparing such a "scheme" a 50% federal grant can be claimed. Consequently any future over-all studies of cities and town will tend to mark out these areas because of the special financial benefits available there.

(Incidentally I should point out to American readers that, in Canada, mortgage insurance under the Housing Act has hitherto only been available on new housing, not existing housing. There have been many demands to extend this to existing housing, but we have held our fire and now, perhaps, have a key instrument to aid renewal).

Now I will endeavor to make some general comments on some of the cities and some of the circumstances where urban renewal studies have been done.

First of all I might suggest that in two particular respects Canadian cities differ from American cities and so our renewal problems are neither so massive nor so awkward. In the first place we did not have what Lewis Mumford calls a "palaeo-technic" period of industrialization in the period of steam power and a large urban working-class; our industrialization has come in a later period. So Canadian cities do not generally contain large

acreages of tenements and standardized workers' housing. Secondly, we do not have problems of a racial minority or sub-culture that so confuse the urban renewal issues in the United States.

If one could make an over-simplified picture of the renewal scene in Canadian cities, it would be something like this: Almost all Canadian cities started as settlements on a water-front, either on a river or a lake or on a sea-harbor. Here a settlement straggled out along the water-side and many of the early settlers' houses were replaced by warehouses and industries. The city center developed at the heart of the settlement and gradually shifted back up the hill away from the water-front. Suburbs developed behind this as the population grew and the land was serviced. So, in looking at the older and obsolete areas of cities, most of the urban renewal studies deal with these recurring themes:

1. The primitive water-front itself — usually a chaotic mixture of warehouses, old-established industries and vestigial remnants of housing. Buried in this chaos are sometimes, as in Montreal, some historic buildings of great interest.
2. The Core of the city, shifting and solidifying and trying to discover its valid functions in a period of decentralization.
3. The old suburbs, now in a 60 and 75 and 80 year-old

vintage, in a key location near the Core, but occupied by low-income families.

Not long after Matt Lawson started on the Toronto Renewal Study in 1955 (and I will return to this later) there came a call from Halifax, Nova Scotia, an embattled harbor city that had had a rough time through two world wars and a depression and now, almost for the first time in its long history, was enjoying some unexpected stability and affluence. The Citadel looks out over the deep sea-harbor and on the hillside below it is the city center with the old northern suburb on the harbor hillside to your left. The person sent to look at Halifax's renewal problems was Professor Gordon Stephenson who had recently come to the University of Toronto after being the head of the Liverpool School of Civic Design. I think he had missed the smell of the sea and the sound of the gulls and Halifax appealed to him immensely. With his wife to study the social problems, he settled down to understand Halifax and wrote a famous report that has had remarkable results. Stephenson wanted to clear the decks and give the city center a proper water-front for public enjoyment and he had detailed ideas for the revival of the old northern suburb that now lies between the city center and the high bridge across the harbor to Dartmouth.

Before any clearance could be done in the old northern suburb a particularly beautiful public housing project, Mulgrave Park, was built further along the harbor hillside, for relocation purposes. The old neighborhood has now been opened up with playgrounds, parking areas for the commercial center and further public housing. Meanwhile, a critical pocket of slum, lying right against the heart of the city, known as the Jacob Street area, was cleared out and proposals were invited for its re-use. I have not space here to pursue this fascinating Cinderella story, the conclusion of which is not yet revealed. The gist of the story is that, in place of this humble pocket of tumble-down slum, the people of Halifax were offered a new city center of dazzling magnificence and princely proportions — to be called the Cornwallis Center. In their most Freudian dreams none had contemplated quite such a transformation act and one could not be quite sure that this was a real fulfillment of the true inner beauty and character of this historic city that has its own grace and charm.

I must now take a leap to the Pacific Coast where, at about the same time, Gerald Sutton-Brown, Vancouver's then Director of Planning, embarked on a comprehensive and systematic study of the city's blighted areas. The heart of Vancouver is a peninsula with Stanley Park occupying

the tip; behind this is a densely occupied apartment district and behind this again is the central business district. The peninsula is almost cut off from the mainland by False Creek, a kind of backwater that has collected on its water-front a tangled mixture of industries, warehouses and old housing. On the neck of land that connects the peninsula to the mainland is a destitute neighborhood called the Strathcona district that was left behind by the surging and sprawling growth that debouched in a rather disorderly manner over the main site of the city, between the Fraser River and the Mountains. Sutton-Brown mounted his main attack on the Strathcona neighborhood and boldly put the first public housing project right on the only public open space, Maclean Park. This has been followed by further acquisition and clearance to restore the park space, to build another public housing project, Raymur Avenue, to provide industrial sites and to attract private housing developers. In other words the Strathcona campaign has made use of a number of renewal weapons.

Meanwhile the conditions on the False Creek water-front, that had been carefully examined in the Urban Renewal Study, were given some attention of a house-keeping kind and this had appeared to encourage some private redevelopment and some new vitality; so further public action here has been deferred. Within the heart of the city, on the peninsula, important decisions are now taking place that may give to the Core of the city a firm shape that it has never quite achieved. Vancouver is still a sprawling teen-ager of a city and, for this reason, perhaps it is still difficult to perceive the form it will take in maturity and the direction in which urban renewal should work. The older the city the clearer the pattern.

Jumping back to the center of the country, Winnipeg is the only city that had to take three doses of urban renewal study before it was able to come up with any renewal action. Perhaps this had been due to a difficulty in deciding where its real heart lay — whether on the axis of the provincial Legislature and the Hudson's Bay Store or down by the old City Hall.

Winnipeg is where the CPR tracks cross the Red River, flowing north to Hudson's Bay. The movement of grain from the western prairies is handled in the CPR marshalling yards just West of the Red River and a few blocks south of this is Portage Avenue, a great continental street that leads to the western horizon. Between Portage Avenue and the CPR yards is the Notre Dame area, the home of early generations of immigrants and the inevitable target of the first renewal studies done in 1957. Nothing



came of this and in 1959 a second study was directed at the west side of the Red River where the primitive waterfront has become the site of the city's principal businesses and industries with the usual remnants of early housing. The City Hall is also on Main Street between the CPR bridgehead and the head of Portage Avenue; as soon as it was decided that this was to be the site of new civic and cultural buildings, renewal plans began to crystallize in relationship with this civic Core. Now Winnipeg has built its first relocation public housing project on a suburban site and clearance and rehabilitation have begun on the blighted area within a stone's throw of the historic spot where the CPR crosses the Red River. Meanwhile, the Director of the Metropolitan Planning Commission is

engaged on the third and the most comprehensive renewal study of the whole Winnipeg area.

I will not attempt to describe what is going on in Montreal and Quebec (studies have been done in both cities) because, like everything else taking place in the great resurgence of French Canada, the issues at stake are extremely complicated. Even if I understood the issues, they would deserve more space than I could give them here. I will only hazard these few comments.

What is going on in the rebuilding of the business center of Montreal, around Place Ville Marie and Dominion Square is one of the most spectacular operations of city-building in North America. The dynamic energies of capitalism are displayed here in their most powerful expression. Some of this is magnificent and beautiful, with its soaring office towers; but the forces are also ugly, violent and devastating in their effect upon the surrounding living areas that are being laid waste. I'm afraid there is a dreadful imbalance in this and the resurgence of Quebec has given far too little attention to the housing requirements of the urban people of French Canada. However it is good to know that both great Universities of the province, the University of Montreal and Laval, are now becoming concerned with this important cultural problem and perhaps they will be able to propound something better than the congested walk-ups of the old city and the dreary duplexes of the suburbs.

In this hasty excursion across Canada I must now return to Ontario and will mention two cities where our distinguished commentator, Murray Jones, has been involved with renewal — Windsor and Hamilton.

The original Windsor study was done in 1958 by Dr. Eugenio Faludi. It has been effective in bringing about some clearance, redevelopment and a public housing project, Glengarry Court, within an old inner suburb. The study also dealt with a blighted area in the shadow of an automobile plant, rather typical of the low-density spill-



Private enterprise changes the face of Montreal.

over which has been the characteristic of any automobile city. But perhaps most interesting was the concern to gather together a strong civic core for this loosely connected community, and to provide this core with a polite and formal waterfront facing across the river to Detroit. This was an excellent and ambitious idea that, naturally, involved considerable difficulties in putting together both the public and private features of the Core. Murray Jones has been involved in this stage of the work.

Hamilton is likely to have an important place in our urban renewal history because of the work of rehabilitation now being done in what is called "the North End". This is an old neighborhood that looks out over the sheltered bay at the western end of Lake Ontario. By an accident of topography and because it is cut off from the rest of the city by the railway, it has continued its own quiet family life remarkably little disturbed by the great steel industries nearby and isolated from the vigorous growth of the city behind it. With its own schools and churches and stores it has some of the atmosphere of a country town; a little faded perhaps, but a place that is altogether worth protecting. There are few enough of such places in our big cities.

But perhaps the most interesting aspect of Hamilton is its role as the western sub-center of the great megalopolis on the shores of Lake Ontario, with Toronto at the center and Oshawa as the eastern sub-center. There would be obvious advantages in trying to strengthen these two sub-centers in order to take the load off the principal core of Toronto.

At present their vitality is sucked away and weakened by the great attractions of central Toronto, both for busi-

ness and entertainment. What should be the special functions of these sub-centers that would give them a life of their own? What could be done to cultivate and attract these functions? The present study of Hamilton's central area, being conducted by Murray Jones, is, I believe, involved in these questions.

In conclusion I want to pay tributes to two people who have made very special contributions to Community Renewal Programing in Canada.

The first is Matt Lawson, the City of Toronto's Planning Director. I have mentioned that he originated the first Urban Renewal Study in 1955. This was not only a pioneering job that suggested what could be done with the legislation that we had at that time; it also foreshadowed the Second Round of urban renewal in Canadian cities with the objectives of conservation and detailed neighborhood renewal that may now be carried out with the 1964 legislation. Subsequently Matt Lawson originated the important feasibility studies now being carried out under the direction of Dr. Albert Rose, to try and find out in a realistic way what are the resources of individual owners to rehabilitate their own properties. The City of Toronto Planning Board, under the chairmanship of Harold Clark, has also carried out two other kinds of programatic study which, I believe, show a remarkable understanding of the real nature and opportunities of city renewal. These are the series of design studies of several secondary neighborhoods and centers within the city, to show how they can be adapted to a contemporary use. And, not least, is the Planning Boards study of the whole central area as a place of business, entertainment, civic and cultural uses. ♦♦♦